

Albert Gallatin Jenkins 13

# Rep. John Carille Proves To Be Formidable Opponent

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By CONGRESSMAN  
KEN KECHELER

In his first race for the House of Representatives in 1857, the 28-year-old Jenkins faced a formidable opponent in Congressman John S. Carille, of Clarksburg, a man later elected to the United States Senate from West Virginia. In 1855, in the 19 - county 11th Congressional

District, Congressman Carille had been elected as a member of the "Know-Nothing Party" — the only seat the Democrats lost in the state of Virginia.

Early in the campaign, Challenger Jenkins invaded his opponent's home territory, and here is how one newspaper described his first efforts:

"Mr. Jenkins opened the canvass in Harrison County, in a few remarks to a small audience in Milford, on Friday last. On Saturday, he addressed the people at Rome's Mill, on Monday at Bridgeport and on

Tuesday at Shinnston. At each of these places, excepting Milford, where the notice of his speaking was imperfectly circulated, he had very respectable audiences — the general curiosity to see and hear our new candidate bringing together a larger number of persons than usual — larger even than was expected.

Called "Powerful Reasoner"

"In his efforts in this county, Mr. Jenkins has more than fulfilled the expectations of his most sanguine friends. He has

proved himself a powerful and cogent reasoner, divested of the special pleading and superficialities of demagogues. His style of oratory is plain and unassuming, yet forcible and conclusive; and he possesses the happy faculty of interesting while he instructs his hearers. We never heard a speaker more effectually command the attention of an audience.

"With the land question, he appears perfectly acquainted, and he handles it with as much familiarity as a boy does his marbles. This bloated humbug

of Know-nothingism disappears before the force of his facts and arguments. His fog before the sun. Those who have been disposed to favor the distribution measure, after hearing Mr. Jenkins, are convinced not only of the entire futility, but of the criminality of the project. We have heard of some who did not admit being convinced by his presentation of the unconstitutional and deleterious effects of this measure.

"He is fresh from the people — never having held or sought an office. Although he has done

good service for the cause of Democratic principles, he has preferred the quietude of his farm at Green Bottom, to the turmoil of political life. Those who have been disposed to jeer him on account of his lack of gray hairs will find in him a fine specimen of an old head on young shoulders."

The preceding article appeared in the Clarksburg Republican. Other newspapers were equally charitable about the young candidate's campaign efforts in his first race.

## Land Division Issue

The Parkersburg News had this to say:

"In accordance with his regular appointment, Mr. Jenkins, the Democratic candidate for Congress, addressed the people on Wednesday last in a speech of two hours' length, with great ability and to the universal satisfaction of his audience. Though the fact of his having spoken here but one week previous, and also the knowledge of his intention to address the people at various places throughout the county kept many away who would otherwise have attended, he still had a good audience, who throughout the whole speech listened with great interest and uninterrupted attention.

"As was expected, the burden of his effort was directed against the land division humbug proposed by Mr. Carille which he completely annihilated. No phase of it was neglected, and the most overwhelming mass of arguments, fairly and logically stated, so that its warmest supporters were compelled to acknowledge the force and completeness of its overthrow. . . . The gains of Mr. Jenkins in this county have greatly surprised both his friends and opponents, evincing really remarkable talents combined with education and general information to a degree very rarely to be found. In fact, we predict for him a position in the next Congress in the front rank of Virginia's solid phalanx of State's Rights Democrats."

Praised for Eloquence —

Echoing the sentiments of the Parkersburg News, the Kan-

awha Valley Star editorially declared on May 12, 1857, shortly before the close of the campaign:

"Our gallant standard-bearer in this Congressional District, with the energy and zeal of a Wise (Governor of Virginia and later Confederate General — Ed.), is winning laurels for himself by his eloquence, logic and reasoning — proving himself worthy of the support of each and every voter in the district who would guard and protect the public lands as an inheritance for ourselves and for our children. Young as he is,

he has already won for himself, by his masterly speeches upon the hustings, the reputation of a statesman of no ordinary ability, and we predict for Albert G. Jenkins, the Cabell County boy, a reputation in the councils of the Nation equal to Virginia's most gifted men in the next Congress of the United States."

There were of course many sources of opposition to Jenkins in the hotly-fought campaign. Congressman Carille was a seasoned and intelligent campaigner and he was a man of great energy and ability, as demonstrated by his later leadership in the founding of the State of West Virginia and his career in the United States Senate.

Supported by Press

In the battle of the press, however, Jenkins had most of the newspapers on his side. Occasionally, a Carille-supporting newspaper like the Parkersburg Gazette would come out with a stinging editorial calling on the Democrats to "trot back the Cabell County colt and withdraw him from the canvass." But generally, Jenkins had a favorable press throughout the congressional district.

As the campaign drew toward a close, the incumbent Congressman Carille and his young challenger clashed repeatedly on public platforms. One of these meetings is described in the following account printed in the May 26, 1857, edition of the Kanawha Valley Star, a few days prior to the election (which was held in those days on the fourth Thursday in May):

"On Friday last the citizens

large numbers at Glenville to hear the discussion between Messrs. Jenkins and Carille. The debate was opened by the latter gentleman in a speech of two hours. He dealt more largely than usual in aspersions of our own Commonwealth, his aim seeming to be to persuade his hearers that old Virginia had sunk into abject poverty and decrepitude in consequence of having been defrauded out of large quantities of land, which had been given to the western states. Not a word was said by him in favor of his land bill, or any other scheme of distribution in particular, unless we consider as such the reading of copious extracts from old speeches of leading Democrats, which he endeavored to torture into a defense of the general idea of distribution. Not a breath of applause was elicited from the most sanguine of his supporters, at any time during or at the conclusion of his speech . . .

Reflects Partisanship

"The speech of Mr. Jenkins was like all his efforts, argumentative and to the point. He most scathingly sarcastic rebuke to those who had seen fit

to perpetrate slanderous reports against him, many of which had originated in Glenville. He next compared the past political history of Mr. Carille and his party with their present positions, showing up their inconsistencies with an unsparing hand. He then opened up on Mr. Carille's system of distribution, and proved its utter incompetency as a whole to effect what was claimed for it, as well as its utter inconsistency, unfairness and lack of merit of any kind, in any of its points. The minds of his audience were entirely disabused from the effects of Mr. Carille's defamation of Virginia, and in fact of all his sophisticated appeals, while the personal attacks of his opponent were triumphantly met and their intent frustrated. During his remarks he was repeatedly interrupted by bursts of applause . . .

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As can be seen from the above accounts, journalism of that day reflected the bitter partisanship of the campaign. It had indeed been a grueling and hard-fought contest between competitors each of whom were outstanding men. At the end of May, Jenkins returned to his Greenbottom homestead to await the returns.

(To Be Continued)